

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2013

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ENVIRONMENT

Pre-cleanup PCB plan is agreed to

By **SCOTT LEARN**
THE OREGONIAN

After more than a year of legal wrangling, the city of Portland and five current and former property owners have agreed to move forward on one of the Portland harbor's most contaminated sites.

The \$1.5 million in "preliminary design" work agreed to at River Mile 11 is a baby step. But it marks progress for a project that has seen relatively little action since the harbor was placed on the government's Superfund list in 2000.

The agreement comes af-

ter river activists and the Environmental Protection Agency pressured the city and other "potentially responsible parties" to advance work at River Mile 11, on the Willamette River's east side between the Broadway and Fremont bridges.

River mud and fish sampled there have the harbor's highest levels of PCBs, a banned but persistent probable carcinogen and the top priority for harbor cleanup.

Heavy ship traffic and dredging probably stirs up the pollution; it's unlikely that it's

just stuck in the mud. And the site is the farthest upstream in the 11-mile-long Superfund site, so it needs cleanup first to avoid recontaminating scrubbed sites downstream.

The work will include additional sediment samples and investigation of land-based contamination sources. If all goes well it should allow cleanup to proceed about a year after the EPA issues a final cleanup plan for the harbor, now expected in 2015.

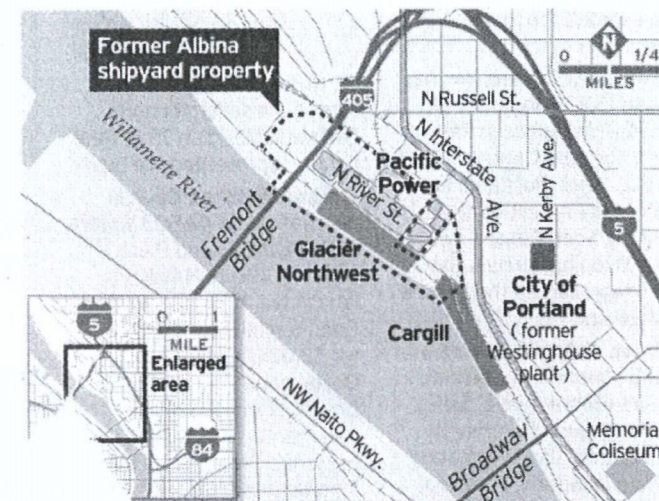
"The folks who've agreed to do this are doing the right thing," said Travis Williams,

executive director of Willamette Riverkeeper. "If this gets us a step closer to getting removal of contaminated sediment from the river bottom, that's what we're aiming for."

A settlement agreement with the EPA is set for City Council approval Wednesday. Portland would cover as much as \$400,000 of the work, tapping a ratepayer-funded environmental remediation fund.

The city owns stormwater pipes that carried contamination to the river. It also bought a former Westinghouse plant

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DAN AGUAYO/THE OREGONIAN

SPORTS APPAREL

Cleanup

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in 1996 that repaired electric transformers with PCB-ridden oil, making the city potentially responsible for the plant's pollution under Superfund law.

CBS Corp., Westinghouse's successor, is part of the settlement agreement. So is PacifiCorp, which rehabbed transformers near River Mile 11, and DIL Trust, an entity representing the Albina Machine Works shipyard, which built Navy ships before and after World War II using PCB-laden paint and caulk.

The shipyard is defunct, but its riverside footprint overlaps much of the current operations of Cargill and Glacier Northwest, which are also part of the settlement.

Williams said the EPA was instrumental to the deal, using its authority to order cleanups to help leverage the settlement.

EPA officials said they couldn't comment in detail before all the parties sign off. But Chip Humphrey, the EPA's remedial project manager, said cleaning up River Mile 11 early is key.

"It has some of the highest levels of PCBs in the harbor and it's at the upstream end," he said. "We really view this as one of the first sites that needs

to be ready to go."

Attorneys for all the parties worried about being labeled a "deep pocket" or admitting responsibility for the eventual cleanup if they stepped out early. The settlement agreement specifies that funding the work does "not constitute an admission of any liability."

"At least we'll know a lot more about the site than we do now," said Dean Marriott, director of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services. "If we can button this one down, when the (cleanup decision) comes out we'll be ready to do whatever has to happen."

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